

Sewage Sludge For Fertilizer--Is It Safe?

Applying sewage sludge to farm fields as a fertilizer is not new. The Chinese and French have used untreated waste to fertilize their land for hundreds of years, and wastes have been used in this country for over a century. But is this practice safe?

If proper procedures are followed it is, says County Agent Joe Way. According to Way, digested sewage sludge is obtained from municipal wastewater treatment plants after it has undergone several stages of treatment.

Almost all bacteria, viruses and pathogenic organisms are destroyed by high temperatures and the pH levels reached in digesting and stabilizing the sludge. Any remaining organisms die off quickly in the hostile soil environment.

conducted by Penn State's Cooperative Extension Service and qualified commercial laboratories. Test results are considered by the Department of Environmental Resources before granting any municipality a permit to apply the sludge on farmlands.

Tests are also done on the soil where the sludge is or has been applied. Appropriate applications of sludge are determined from the combination of sludge and soil tests and specific crop nutrient needs. The farmer and the municipality are required to keep careful records of all applications so that farmers can plan future cropping schedules.

Farmers Must File Form

UNIVERSITY PARK — Farmers who pay individuals \$600 or more for services during a calendar year are required by law to report such payments to the Internal Revenue Service, using form 1099-SC.

"Reporting these payments is easier if the farm operator collects needed information before those payments are made," says Dr. Larry C. Jenkins, extension economist at The Pennsylvania State University. He suggests asking each person providing services for their name, address and taxpayer identification number. For individuals, this is usually the social security number.

Employers must report payments made in the course of business activity and that consist of one or more transactions as long as the total paid to one individual during the year exceeds \$600.

Payments for custom machine work and seasonal employment of labor, such as hay hauling, often result in payments that must be reported. Payment for professional services, such as to a veterinarian, should also be reported if the services are provided by a non-incorporated individual.

A standard form developed by the Internal Revenue Service can be used to collect this information: form W-9, "Payers request for taxpayer identification number and certification." If the employer requests each supplier of services to complete form W-9, then in-

formation required to file the 1099-MISC will be available when needed.

A supplier of services sometimes refuses to supply his or her taxpayer identification number to the payer. In those cases, 20 percent of the total payment may be withheld as a backup withholding to assure tax collection on the payments made.

If backup withholding is required, the amount withheld may be reported to the Internal Revenue Service on line 4 of form 1099-MISC. The tax withheld due to the payee's failure to provide a taxpayer identification number is reported at line 11 of IRS form 941.

Farm operators who pay an individual \$600 or more for services and do not report those payments with a 1099-MISC are subject to a \$50 penalty. That penalty applies to:

1. each failure to file an information return with the Internal Revenue Service by Feb. 28 of the year following the year when payment for services was made.

2. each failure to furnish the payment recipient's taxpayer identification number on the return.

3. each failure to furnish an information return to the payee by Jan. 31 of the year following the year of payment for services.

If the payer fails to include his or her taxpayer identification number on any return, statement, or document, there is an additional penalty of \$5.

Because sludge often includes industrial waste, it may contain heavy metals and trace elements such as copper, zinc, lead, nickel, chromium and cadmium. These elements can be toxic to plants at low levels. Some represent a hazard to the food chain.

Therefore, sludge must be analyzed to determine its suitability before it can be applied to cropland soils. These tests are

Penn State researchers have tested hundreds of sludge samples and found that the content varies greatly. Thus, the sludge tests are necessary to determine not only heavy metal content, but also the amounts of nutrients the farmer will get from the sludge. Most sludge contains appreciable levels of nitrogen and phosphorus, making it a valuable plant nutrient source.

The land application of sludge is economically beneficial to both the municipality and the farmer. Applying sludge to land is less expensive than landfilling or incinerating the sludge. Sludge is readily available to farmers and can help them cut their fertilizer bills.

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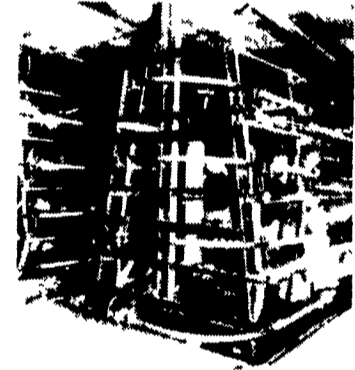
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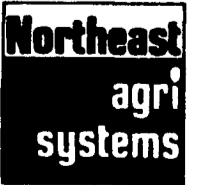
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Thornburgh Signs Prompt Payment Bill

HARRISBURG — Pennsylvania's poultry and egg producers have less than three months to wait until a bill ensuring prompt payment for their commodities becomes law.

House Bill 976 received Governor Dick Thornburgh's signature on Wednesday after two years of running the legislative gauntlet. Passed by the Senate on May 6, and the House on June 18, H.B. 976 requires that poultrymen must

receive payment for their poultry and eggs within 20 days following the sale of their products, unless an alternative payment plan had been previously agreed upon, in writing, by the buyer and seller.

"We're pleased that it passed," said Pennsylvania Grange spokesman, Kathy Miller. "The growers can be guaranteed more protection now from defaulting processors." The bill becomes law 90 days after being signed by the Governor.

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